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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000421

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/07/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: CHARGE DELIVERS MESSAGE ON AUGUST ELECTION  
PRESIDENTIAL CONTINUITY

REF: A. KABUL 413  
[1](#)B. KABUL 244

Classified By: CDA Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. On 2/26, the Charge met separately with United Front (UF) leader Burhanuddin Rabbani, Lower House Deputy Speaker Mirwais Yaseni, Hazara leader and MP Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq, and UF member, and grandson of the late king, Mustapha Zahir Shah to inform them of U.S. support for the 8/20 election date as well as a strong central government headed by President Karzai from after 5/22 until the inauguration of the next president. Three of them preferred Karzai step aside after 5/22 in favor of a non-partisan interim leader, while Yaseni did not oppose Karzai remaining. Most understood the U.S. position and would be willing to consider a political agreement that would leave Karzai in place over the summer.

U.S. Position

[1](#)2. (C/NF) In his separate meetings with Rabbani, Yaseni, Mohaqqueq and Zahir, Charge explained the U.S. position on elections and transitional authority (ref A). Charge declared that the United States recognized that the weight of legal opinion had concluded that the President's term ended on 5/22, but equally, as a practical matter, elections could not be held before 5/22. Thus, the only way forward was a political understanding between Karzai and the opposition. The United States understood and accepted as legitimate the opposition's concerns about the power of the incumbency, but all had to reach a solution that preserved 8/20 and left the president and government in place.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) In previous meetings, each of the four had told us they expected Karzai would manipulate government resources to benefit his campaign, leading them to push for his resignation after 5/22 if he intended to run for re-election on 8/20. Karzai's consideration of an early election, a development that would all but end the opposition's hopes for victory, has softened their stance. Most now welcome U.S. efforts to lead the Afghan political establishment to a consensus political agreement, though the thought of Karzai remaining in office for three-five more months may yet take a few days to sink in.

Rabbani

[1](#)4. (C/NF) Rabbani reaffirmed his support for the 8/20 election date and told Charge he "understood" the U.S. position, but did not accede to our view. He and the UF would promote security and stability in the country. Still, he believed Karzai was looking for any means to stay in power in order to exploit the advantages of incumbency. He was skeptical any voluntary limitations on Karzai's executive authority over the summer would satisfy opposition concerns. Governors, police chiefs, and district administrators who might improperly influence the election in Karzai's favor

were already in place, he said. Like other leaders, he suspected that late-breaking news that Karzai could call an earlier election was a ploy to create a crisis in order to remain in office. Rabbani added that the delay in resolving the post-5/22 presidential continuity question was holding up an announcement of the UF's candidate. "We want to solve these other questions first," he said.

Yaseni  
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15. (C/NF) Deputy Speaker Yaseni, who affirmed his intention to run for president (ref B), told Charge he would support Karzai remaining in office after 5/22 and an August election date. In return, he requested the international community undertake certain commitments to ensure a free, fair, open, and transparent election, and prevent the Palace and other government agencies from interfering on behalf of Karzai's campaign. One concrete request was to prevent the security services from harassing candidates. The Charge said the U.S. would in any case support such actions, calling them "the minimum requirements for a free election." Yaseni warned he may not be able to publicly commit to all aspects of the U.S. position without upsetting some of his supporters, but would put the interests of the country and a successful election ahead of his own.

Mohaqeq  
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16. (C/NF) Head of the Hazara-based Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Mardum Mohammad Mohaqeq affirmed his support for the 8/20 election

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date, saying early elections were impossible due to weather conditions, lack of time for the opposition to organize, and the need for open and fair elections for all Afghans. Mohaqeq supported creation of a caretaker government headed either by Upper House Speaker Mojaddedi, Lower House Speaker Qanooni, or Chief Justice Azimi, but expressed willingness to consider a caretaker government under Karzai, as long as the president operated under diminished authorities. Mohaqeq's ideas on limiting his authority included putting the IDLG under the Ministry of the Interior, and replacing Interior Minister Atmar and IEC Chairman Ludin with neutral figures to ensure fairness in the elections. He could not predict the UF's response to such a proposal.

Zahir  
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17. (C/NF) Mustapha Zahir also supported the 8/20 election date. He expressed concern that the presidential continuity question would lead to a crisis that could destabilize the country after 5/22. The UF and other opposition groups would oppose any effort by Karzai to move the election forward, which he expected the president would announce this week. Zahir appreciated pressure from the international community to keep Karzai in line and agreed that only a political consensus could provide an acceptable way forward. "Karzai is not the same man I knew 10 years ago," he said. "He's tired and unsure about his team." Palace and MFA protocol chief Amb. Seddiq had recently called Zahir to request he lend his support to Karzai's plan to remain in office. Zahir said he was worried Karzai would use him and his family's name as a "trophy" and was still considering what role he might take. He preferred Karzai not stand for reelection and remain president through the interim period. At the same time, Zahir was committed to using his family's good name to promote national unity. He would encourage the Palace, Parliament, and political leaders to seek a political agreement that put national interests ahead of their own.

DELL